

## Make Some Marvelous Maracas!

Most folks consider maracas to be native to Latin America, however, similar instruments (pairs of rattles) can be found in cultures around the world. Most often associated with the music of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Venezuela, Jamaica and Brazil, maracas have been played for centuries. One set of maracas made of clay were found in ruins in present day Columbia. They were used by the indigenous people of that area and dated back to almost 1,500 years ago.

Maracas come in all sorts of sizes, shapes and designs!

What are maracas made of? Most traditional maracas are made from natural materials such as gourds, clay, wood or coconut shells. More modern ones can be made of plastic, leather or other synthetic materials. They are filled with small objects such as seeds, pebbles or dried beans. To create “recycled rattles” you can start with smaller water bottles from the recycling bin and be even more clever with fillings – finding things you can easily use from around the house, garage or in your junk drawer.

### Get Out Your Materials!

Although you can use any type of small plastic bottles, the 8 oz (236 mL) size water bottles are just perfect for this project in size and shape. If you’ve sworn off plastic, then ask around. A neighbor, classmate or local store may offer you what they might have sent out as recycling.

You’ll also need two toilet paper rolls and some sturdy tape. Electrical tape works best and colorful electrical tape adds a nice decorative touch to what you are creating.

Then you’ll need some fillings. Remember each filling produces a different sound, so that may also be part of your plan for creating your set of maracas. For instance, sand or salt maracas will be very quiet. Dried beans, macaroni or large bead maracas will be nice and loud. Here are some suggestions that you can find around most every household:

Sand, salt, pebbles, birdseed, rice, beans, small beads, large beads, dried pasta, rice, dried peas or beans, small washers, paper clips, small erasers.

A complete supply list is provided below as well as some suggestions for great sounding maraca combinations.

### Make Your Maracas

First take your clean and dried 8 oz water bottle and fill with your chosen contents. Close it up with the cap and then listen to the sound. Once it sounds good to your ears, then you can move to the next step. But first, check out how many professional maracas are made – they are created to be slightly different in sound.

Many sets of maracas are “pitched” differently. In other words, shaking the right hand one will sound different from shaking the left hand one, so you can create some great patterns by playing with the sounds. For instance, if you make my version of rice and beans maracas (described below), the rice will be sound a bit softer and higher in pitch, the beans a bit louder and lower in pitch, so you can build rhythms on those sounds. You can also describe the rhythms in a fun way, such as rice, rice, beans, rice, rice beans or rice, beans, rice, rice beans. Almost anyone can learn new rhythms and even complicated rhythm patterns with this creative approach.

So, now you’ve decided how you want your pair of maracas to sound and you’ve tightened the cap on your two water bottles. The next step is to create the handle. Take your two toilet paper rolls and make a straight cut from one end to the other. Tighten the roll in on itself to about the size of a  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch dowel and then apply your electrical tape. Start wrapping the tape around the bottom part of the rattle on the bottle and move down onto the new handle. Wrap slowly, covering all the cardboard of the toilet paper roll and you will have created a rather sturdy handle for your new instrument. Now you are ready to play.

Time to Jam!

Do you want to just jam? Then simply pick up your instrument and shake, shake, shake. Or dance around, move and groove, and shake things up to your heart’s content. If you want to get into more of the maraca’s musical possibilities, then take some time to check out what they can do.

Aside from shaking them back and forth where the sound comes from the contents striking the sides, you can swoosh them around. By moving your hand in a circular motion, the contents of your maracas won’t hit side to side, but will whoosh a bit around in the bottle, creating a different sound. You can also “crescendo” your maracas. You start by shaking them quietly and slightly and then build little by little to get the loudest sound. It’s a fun way to begin or end a song.

